

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Health Department Peer Recovery Support Program Aids Opioid Recovery Efforts

Columbia, MD – In its continuing battle against the opioid crisis, the Howard County Health Department's (HCHD) Bureau of Behavioral Health has employed five Peer Recovery Support Specialists during the past year to connect with individuals directly affected by substance misuse. These peers use their own life experiences to guide and support others in recovery from mental health and/or substance use disorders.

The program, which began in October 2016, receives referrals of individuals struggling with substance use disorders— many with opioid addiction – from the Howard County Police Department, Howard County General Hospital, Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center and other community support and treatment programs. Peer Recovery Support staff provide emotional support, resources or referral services as necessary.

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, Peer Recovery Support staff responded to 148 total referrals in the community, helping to guide many of those individuals into treatment and recovery programs. In the first three months of FY18, Health Department Peer Recovery Support staff has already received 80 referrals from partner organizations.

Peer Recovery Support staff are eligible to apply for certification with the Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-Health Professional Certification Board (MABPCB) after recording 500 hours of support experience, 46 hours of specialized behavioral health training, 25 hours of supervision, and documentation showing at least two years in sustained recovery.

“Our Peer Recovery Support staff will meet with an overdose victim at the hospital or at the Health Department to provide that victim with support and help them find treatment and recovery options,” said Howard County Health Officer, Maura Rossman. “We think this best practice will help more individuals struggling with substance abuse enter treatment and remain on the path to recovery from this disease.”

Peer Recovery Support staff are an effective tool in communicating with individuals currently battling substance use or mental health disorders because they can serve as role models for living in

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recovery, bring hope to those seeking treatment and directly facilitate access to support services. Research has shown that social support is an important aspect of recovery and peer staff, help to build that relationship that by staying directly engaged with an individual throughout the recovery process and helping to reduce the recidivism rate.

Howard County residents who are in need of treatment or who believe they would benefit from the services of a Peer Recovery Support staff can contact the HCHD, Bureau of Behavioral Health at 410-313-6202. If in need of urgent crisis support 24/7, call the Maryland Crisis Hotline at 800-422-0009. For more information about services available in the county, visit www.hchealth.org/gethelp. You may find a link for county level resources on the website including information on free Overdose Response Program (ORP) training and naloxone, a medication to reverse an opioid overdose.

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